

IS COURTESY REALLY WANING IN NEW YORK?

Complaints of Rudeness at the Telephone and From People You Meet in Business or the Streets—A Society for the Propagation of Plain Politeness Declared to Be a Growing Present Day Need

"I'm thinking of starting a society for the propagation of plain politeness," said a lawyer who was born and bred in New York and has been practicing here for fifteen years. "I'll bet more than I ever earned or ever hope to earn that if I could get my society started it would do more to facilitate business than the efforts of all the so-called industrial experts put together."

"I'm not down on the experts, either. They're doing wonders. But if you want to get a shock just analyze your own experience and see how much of your

"Well, to make a long and painful story short, we ended by cordially cursing each other at great length and I slammed the phone back on the hook after wasting fifteen minutes of time and enough energy to have done half a day's plain work. Plain, common courtesy would have made that little business transaction go off smoothly in less time than I wasted over it and both of us would have been in good humor for the next thing that came along."

Chips on Their Shoulders.
"They talk about the high price of

been associated with a man of good breeding and kindness."

Other men besides the lawyer above quoted made the point that a great deal of the rudeness complained of is puzzling because it is poor business. One man said that if a telephone attachment could be invented by which a man at one end of the wire could knock down a man at the other end there would be a reform in one direction anyway.

A cowardly boor takes advantage of the fact that you can't reach him," this man declared. "I wish I knew just



THE BOX OFFICE BEAR.

have grown careless about their own manners and the children that are growing up aren't even getting any manners to be careless about. The acts of courtesy I do meet are generally from older men. Half grown boys and girls are about as far along in that respect as healthy young bear cubs. I do love a bear cub and I delight in boys and girls. But their manners are very much alike.

"Take Fifth Avenue at the promenade hour, or any other hour for that matter. These young folks parade up and down with a sublime disregard for any one else's rights to even a modest fraction of the sidewalk. I've been bumped aside by young men and women of half my age and received not a word of apology, not even a deprecatory glance. My father would have stepped into the street if necessary before he would have jostled women aside as I see young men doing every day."

"And it isn't because they are under the necessity of doing it in order to meet some important engagement. They are simply doing the avenue. They have all the time there is. But there is one thing they

ness. Courtesy isn't dying out with them. It just hasn't been born, that's all."

"People come to New York and make a lot of money; or maybe they make it first and then come. They are like a horse that feels its oats. They don't know a fence when they see one. They simply coast early all over their own side and yowls and mias, and run wild in the flower gardens of conventionalities and traditions till they make things look like a county fair on the day after."

"Seriously, those people think they are showing what grand folks they are. The man that keeps his expensive hat on when he goes into an office really believes that he is advertising his importance. Of course he is advertising the fact that he never had a grandfather. If he did, why, that respected relative probably was of the kind that wore his hat at the dinner table and didn't wear his coat."

"You see we're making some progress, anyway. The present descendant of said grandfather at least keeps his coat on even if he doesn't take his hat off. In time he will doubtless reach the dizzy height of politeness of doing both."

"You'll find that most of the people who make these breaks are not doing it deliberately. You can trace it back to their early customs. There's the man who brings a stale stub of a cigar into a car. Generally he's a well dressed man; looks prosperous and all that. But I suppose he was poor as Job not so very long ago and a cigar was a luxury not to be lightly regarded. He can't get over the habit of economy he formed then. So he victimizes everybody around him by cherishing the stub."

Smiles When Snubbed.
"That sort of thing runs all through one's experience. Oh, yes! I get provoked plenty of times but I have some compensation. It makes me feel so superior when I have been courteous to somebody and have been snubbed for my pains. I've developed a system of retaliation that doesn't hurt any one and that affords me amusement. For instance, I have a habit of saying 'Thank you' to a saleswoman when she gives me my parcel and change. I simply do it unconsciously. Occasionally the girl herself says 'Thank you' and then all is well."

"But I confess that it pretty generally happens that I, who am paying my money and am supposed to be the one who is conferring patronage, am a solo performer on the 'Thank you' stop. Then I hesitate and look expectantly at the girl. She is puzzled; perhaps asks if my 'change ain't right' or if that 'ain't my parcel.' I say 'Oh, yes!' but continue to look expectant."

"If she asks me what I am waiting for I smile to myself and say indulgently: 'For something which you do not have.' Then I turn away, leaving her to worry over it. Even if it doesn't come to my making that little speech I retire with a lingering look of smiling pity, which I can see is most disastrous to the young person's self-satisfaction."

"You've no idea how the scheme works. Why, car conductors that were as unpleasant to me as a hyena when I got on have become so tame that they would have eaten out of my hand by the time I got off. And the beauty of it is I don't have to do anything but smile and look pleasantly superior. I love to do both, so that is the role for me."

"It's splendid too in case of people who talk loud in public places. Those people are not really discourteous to the other folks around. (Of course it's disturbing and one hates to be in that atmosphere, but it isn't anything you can actively resent. But if you can let them discover you to be amused, pityingly amused, they quite collapse."

"But what," demanded the reporter, "what can you do when people are rude to you on the street? You can't hold up traffic while you apply the pitying smile treatment."

"No," sighed the woman. "It won't work then. And if you drive me to the wall I will admit that there are other times when it is a broken reed. I've tried it on hotel clerks with such consistent lack of success that I believe they must have been inoculated against it. Do you know I expect to live to a good old age, but if I should last a hundred years I should nevertheless carry some unsolved mysteries with me to my timely grave. One of them is why so many hotel clerks act as if they were in a pest house and were nobly trying to discourage you from staying around the awful place."

"Another is why a box office man thinks it a sign of insanity, idiocy or crankiness in a woman when she wants to know whether the seats he is selling her are in A or Z. Why do all stout women make an arm rest of you when you sit next them in the theater? Why do men read the morning paper in crowded cars without folding it, so that their arms won't spread out like windmills?"

"Why do people who bring their wet umbrellas into cars hold them against your clothes instead of against their own? Why does no one ever step to the back of an elevator except when it is empty? Why—what's the use?"

"Perhaps if I do live to be a hundred the common courtesy that I say has been born yet among thousands of New Yorkers will have come into existence, and all these problems will cease to be mysteries and will be just one thing. I'm afraid that in the meantime 'Thank you' and 'Excuse me' and 'If you please' will become entirely obsolete. I can just hear my great-grandchildren shouting into my 90-year-old ears: 'Say, gram, what was it you used to say when you wanted anything and when you got it?'"

The Test of Little Things.

"It is probably true that there are men and women who meet big tests all right and yet have no standards about small things. They don't think they are worth making a fuss about. But when the pleasure of everyday living is spoiled by contempt for the small things it is about as big a consideration after all as there is."

"Is courtesy dying out in New York?" another woman was asked.

"Oh," she said, "I don't know that it's dying out. The trouble with New York is that thousands of people have blown in here from the four quarters of the globe who have never had any training in manners; at least not what you mean by man-

and break right in ahead of the patient waiting ones is amazing."

"Sometimes they are flustered by the young persons behind the counter and then 'my heart with rapture thrills.' I reflect greedily on this as an evidence that at least the saleswomen have a sense of justice. Not at all! The next time the situation arises the intruder gets the attention of the girl behind the counter and I realize that unless I assert my rights I may remain indefinitely among those who only stand and wait. So I say politely:

"I beg your pardon. I believe I was here first."

"Does it do any good? Mightily seldom. Occasionally the woman really didn't know she was usurping any one's rights and she asks my pardon and waits her turn. Generally both she and the salesgirl give me a withering look and expect me to shrivel. I appeal to the floorwalker. He thinks I am a crank and the salesgirl is confirmed in her theory that the woman shopper's one thought is to make trouble."

Fifth Avenue Rudeness.

"As far as I am concerned it seems to me I am pathetically eager to return courtesy for courtesy. I went in to get an ice cream soda the other day and was served by a girl who was so pleasant and polite that I looked at her in amazement and when she handed me the glass I said: 'That looks like very good soda, but if it was quinine and vinegar I should I think enjoy it because your courtesy is so rare and so welcome.' She laughed and I laughed, and I'm sure both of us felt in better spirits for the little experience."

"And how it does pay! Why, I shall make it a point after this to go to that particular place. In fact I think I'll find out the girl's name and write to the manager about her."

"The soda water counter, by the way, is the place to see whether women are well bred or not. Most of them have no more idea of taking their turn if they can get ahead of some one else than they have of treating the whole line. And the way they betray their lack of breeding is astonishing. They have children with them, for instance, whom they admonish continually to be careful not to drop anything on their own clothes, while they allow these young hop-frogs to flourish spoonfuls of chocolate soda over your raiment without a word of caution."

"I don't know what is at the root of it all, but I'm afraid the trouble goes right back to the home. Mothers and fathers

THE HAT THAT WON'T COME OFF

pretty conspicuously when you do encounter it. I can generally tell the minute I go into an office what kind of men are at the head. The office boy is a pretty good gauge of the manager. If the latter is a gentleman the whole atmosphere shows it. If he isn't you will find that his ill breeding has filtered down through the whole force."

"It would seem curious if it were not so logical that almost invariably one meets with more courtesy in the big successful places than in the others. The fact is that courtesy makes for success more, I firmly believe, than almost any other one factor in business. Nine out of ten persons will respond to polite treatment. They will loosen up their pocketbooks, they will forgive mistakes, they will advertise you, they will become your devoted customer for life if you treat them with consideration and respect."

"Just take my own case. I sometimes have to encounter men who haven't sense enough or breeding enough to be polite to me. Well, they probably think they are playing the big mogul to perfection and I can see them taking satisfaction in showing their power. But naturally I am an enemy from that moment and while I don't sit up nights thinking of a way to get even with them I generally am presented by an all-wise Providence with an opportunity sooner or later. I am only one of probably dozens of persons who are in precisely the same attitude toward them. Take us all together, we can do them a good many ill turns. And it isn't in human nature to expect that we won't."

In the Streets and Shops.

"There are days when I don't seem to meet with anything but gratuitous discourtesy from morning till night. Luckily I don't get it in my home, which happens to be a small apartment hotel, where the value of politeness is appreciated. It's an example of what I said about the attitude of the management affecting the whole staff. Everybody about the place is at any rate courteous, and the consequence is that all sorts of other things are forgiven and the house is filled year after year by the same people."

"But I start out after breakfast feeling good humored and at peace with everybody, only to enter upon a series of irritations, most of them small, but all together turning me from a happy and friendly person wishing the whole world well into a regular animated grouch."

"I try to take a car. The motorman runs by about thirty feet and I think he isn't going to stop at all. Then I see that he has stopped, so I run after the car. The conductor with his eye upon me rings the bell to go ahead and exchanges a pleasantry with two or three men on the platform apropos of my unavailing sprint."

"It is such uncalculated, gratuitous rudeness that I can't help being angry. And while other experiences that come later may not be quite so direct they all have their effect."

"I am pretty expert at threading street crowds, but I am constantly being jostled and held up by men who try to pass in front of me when it would be just as easy for them to pass behind me. The other day an elderly man drew back to let me pass, and the experience was so unusual that I was tempted to stop and make him a little speech of appreciation. I did thank him, but that didn't seem adequate for a courtesy which, slight as it is, has become uncommon in New York streets."

"As for the women, words fail me. I am not one of the people who talk about woman's inhumanity to woman. I've never seen much of that. But in the thousand little ways in which they could show courtesy and consideration to one another I think they are going steadily from bad to worse."

"I hate with a consuming hatred to go shopping. Perhaps it is my father's training, but I cherish the idea that first come should be first served. It doesn't seem to be a popular notion. The number of my sisters that dash up to a counter

what the wear and tear is on telephone that are slammed on the hooks, because that is the only way outraged feelings can vent themselves. If I could have a bunch before me the smart office boys who have been impertinent to me over the telephone I'd be a regular Herod and order them slaughtered without a pang of remorse."

"And then there's the box office boor. He's another man that takes advantage of his impregnable position. Does he act as if he was there to serve the public? I know certain box offices in this town that could be recommended to relieve temporarily at least the worst case of retarded circulation that ever was. My blood boils every time I have to deal with the fellow behind the window."

"The other day I heard a woman in front of me stop a moment after she had bought her tickets at a certain theatre and say: 'I'd like to thank you for your courtesy and attention. Both are so rare at box offices that they are doubly appreciated when one does receive them. I saw another woman at another window take up \$10 she had laid down for three seats and walk out after saying: 'You seem to be under the impression that you are conferring a favor in allowing me to buy seats here. You are very much mistaken.'"

Courtesy Spells Success.

"The same morning I was in a shoe store when two women came in. One of them told very clearly just what she wanted. The clerk with a supercilious air brought her a pair of shoes which even I could see were not what she had asked for."

"She carefully explained again what she wanted and he began to argue that this pair met the requirements. The woman looked surprised and finally indignantly as his manner became more offensive. At last she said: 'You do not seem to care for customers here. I will go somewhere else.' The two started for the door and the salesman remarked in a perfectly audible tone: 'That's right; go along.' Do you suppose those women will ever go into that store again? Not if they have to go barefoot as an alternative."

"A woman who is earning her own living and meets all kinds of people in the course of her work had an interesting story to tell."

Telephone Courtesy.

Plenty of other people seem ready to join in a chorus bewailing the tendency referred to by the lawyer. Men are not so ready to talk of it, partly because they do not analyze their impressions as women do. They don't have time for it. They accept a rough and ready existence more or less carelessly. A good many of them even like a row."

"One man told of his partner who, after having a violent fight with some one in the morning, always felt as lively as a gamewreck the rest of the day. Unfortunately the partner was made of different stuff. He generally had to be in for the fight, though, and he declared that his business efficiency was less than half what it would have been if he had



SIDEWALK OBSTRUCTIONS.

time and, worse still, your energy and spirit are wasted just bucking against the unnecessary disagreeable things of everyday life."

"If you were running a lot of complicated machinery you would lubricate it with oil, wouldn't you? You wouldn't use sand or brass filings or tacks, would you? But that's about what is done here in New York in running the complicated machinery of daily life."

"Everybody is concerned in this machinery. But how many folks put a little politeness in to make it go smoothly? On the other hand, how many are interfering by a thousand little and big acts that irritate and discourage and disarrange everybody concerned? Why, here's an example right in my morning's work."

"I had occasion an hour ago to telephone a man in connection with a case I am preparing. The girl at central took the number civilly and promptly. I'll make her an honorary member of my society. They're not all like her—but never mind about that."

"In the course of time I heard over the wire an inarticulate grunt which proved to be some sort of vocal exercise on the part of the office boy of the man I wanted. I asked for the man."

"Who's talkin'?" demanded the boy."

"I gave my name."

"What's he want to speak about?"

"Well there were several things I felt a burning desire to speak about at that minute, but I controlled myself and intimated that I had business with the employer of this pleasant youth. I was told 'Ho! wire!' and in the course of time I heard another grunt. This wasn't the office boy kind, but the managerial variety; explosive and dictatorial and saying quite plainly:

"I'm a great, big, wonderful, howling success of an individual, I am. And if you want to do business with me you'll have to look lively and now what do you want?"

"That makes you feel real pleasant by way of a starter. But I asked my question and got another grunt by way of answer. I couldn't make out more than a word or two, so I asked again. This time he snapped back at me that he had answered that question once. Whereupon I remarked with my last gasp of politeness that I hadn't caught his reply."

"Did he repeat it intelligibly? Not on your life! He roared it into the phone so that the receiver fairly danced."

A QUAIN DUTCH CUSTOM

Of the many quaint and curious customs, traditions and privileges prevailing in Holland none is more extraordinary than a certain privilege that has been enjoyed by the boys of Amsterdam for nearly three hundred years."

At a fixed time each summer these boys gather by the hundreds in the great square called the Dam, situated in the centre of the city. Each boy has a drum slung over his shoulder. Facing this square is the Stock Exchange, and on the occasion in question, just as soon as the day's business is over, as many of the boys as can crowd into the building. They proceed to the floor of the exchange, where pursuant to this odd custom they are permitted to march about, singing and beating upon their drums."

The origin of this custom, it is said, is as follows:

The lads, while climbing in among the piles on which the building stood, found instead of his ball a boat moored in a dark corner and loaded with boxes of gunpowder. This showed clearly enough what was afterward ascertained with certainty, the intention of the Spanish conquerors to blow up the Stock Exchange while it was crowded, as it was every day, with the leading citizens of the city."

The boy who stumbled upon the gunpowder at once hurried to the town authorities with his news. The best load of explosives was quietly sunk in the canal and the Spanish plot thus frustrated."

When the burgesses asked the boy what reward he desired for the service he had rendered the town he replied that so long as there was a Stock Exchange in Amsterdam he wanted to be permitted to make the floor of the exchange their playground during a certain part of each year. The request was granted and so the custom survives."